

Still Unofficial, but—

THE METRIC SYSTEM IS CREEPING IN ON U. S.

STEADILY, without much fanfare, the U. S. is adopting the metric system—the standard of weights and measures used by most of the world.

Leading the shift are businesses—especially those competing abroad—educators, some federal agencies.

Also, a new push is getting under way in Congress to make metrics the official system for the nation within a decade. It's a legislative issue, debated now and again for almost 150 years, that may finally be resolved.

Swing by GM. In the meantime—

General Motors, the nation's largest manufacturer, is swinging to a policy of designing all new parts in metrics. The giant firm wants to harmonize production for all GM plants around the world. In the U. S., it will affect about 40,000 of GM's suppliers.

Pintos and Mustangs equipped with 2.3-liter engines are being powered by motors designed entirely in metrics. An estimated 30 to 40 per cent of Ford's production is in foreign markets where metrics are the standard. A shift in the U. S. will make parts interchangeable.

Big international firms such as Caterpillar Tractor, John Deere, International Harvester and IBM have been using metrics for years in foreign trade. They are now working on plans to use more of the same specifications in the U. S.

Before long, shoppers may be buying clothing and textiles with sizes in centimeters and meters, rather than in inches and yards. Sears Roebuck, J. C. Penney and Levi Strauss, among others, are now studying the impact of such changes.

Some canned and packaged foods will soon be carrying metric equivalents to ounces and pounds on their labels.

Later this year, Seven-Up soda will come in ½-liter and liter bottles as a substitute for pints and quarts.

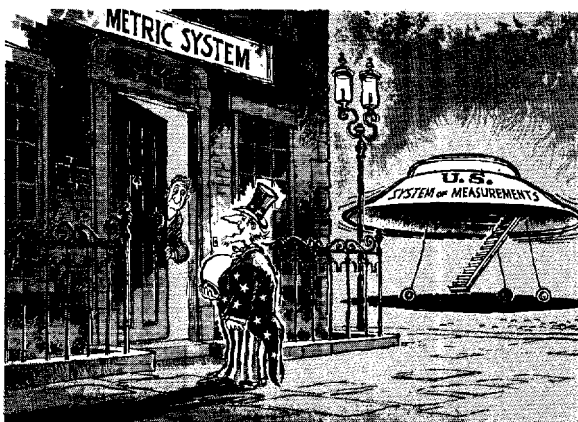
By 1979, all wine sold in the U. S. will be in metric bottles.

Paper, too. An international panel has agreed on a new standard size for widely used office paper—210 by 280 millimeters. It may eventually replace

the 8½ by 11-inch paper found in most U. S. offices today.

Many adults will be in for some trying times computing the new figures. But youngsters in many parts of the country are already getting their first taste of the new standards in school.

At least 14 States are in the early stages of preparing classwork in metrics. Six have enacted laws calling for the metric system to be taught. In California, all elementary-school texts must



"TAKE ME TO YOUR LITER"

include metrics by 1976. Maryland has a six-year program of instruction to shift to the new system.

Many federal agencies are getting on the metric bandwagon, as well.

The U. S. Patent Office is encouraging inventors to include both types of measurements in their patent applications.

Even ships. The Maritime Administration has ordered all ships to be built to metric measures by 1980. All maritime cargo now traveling to and from Europe is marked with dual dimensions.

Federal environmental pollution standards, Agriculture Department crop reports and federal radio-signal measurements all carry the new figures.

Kilometers, as well as miles, are cropping up on highway signs as several States try out the new system.

Some television and radio stations are reporting temperatures in both Fahrenheit and centigrade degrees.

The American National Metric Council has been set up by private industry to aid businesses and government in the conversion process.

However, most experts agree that, if the entire nation is to go metric, it must have full federal backing—an idea that has been kicking around since Thomas Jefferson urged adoption of a decimal system 150 years ago.

In 1866, the National Academy of Sciences recommended shifting to the decimal system, but little came of the proposal. Finally in 1968, Congress ordered the Department of Commerce to look into the problem. It concluded that the transition to metrics was inevitable and the sooner it was carried out the better.

The Senate adopted conversion legislation in 1972 and seemed just as ready to pass a similar bill last year. But the measure bogged down in the House, in large part because of the insistence of labor, along with some business groups, that the Government should pay for new metric-measure tools and equipment made to the metric standard.

Issue of subsidies. One sponsor of metric legislation, Representative Olin Teague (Dem.), of Texas, chairman of the House Science and Astronautics Committee which will hold hearings on the bill, says it will be "one of the first bills to come out of committee." However, aides say Mr. Teague is against federal subsidies for such things as replacement of tools. "You'd need a Government inspector in every tool box," says the aide.

Nevertheless, an official of the AFL-CIO says labor will insist on federal subsidies because "metric conversion would put a great burden on workers." As an example, the official argues that a typical machinist who buys his own tools might spend as much as \$4,000 for a new set of metric-measure tools. Many small businesses say much the same thing—replacing existing equipment could prove prohibitive.

A bill in the Senate, sponsored by Claiborne Pell (Dem.), of Rhode Island, would provide grants of up to \$2,000 to offset retooling costs.

Says one industry official:

"There's bound to be a lot of hauling and tugging over the final version of the bill, but if everybody gives a little I think we can finally get the switch to metrication under way."

Supporters of the legislation estimate that the switch could add from 500 to 700 million dollars in exports a year—and foreign firms could increase sales 300 to 500 million in the U. S.

Failure to make the switch would leave the U. S. out of step with the entire industrialized world. About the only nations that have not adopted the metric system are Brunei, Burma, Liberia, the Yemen Arab Republic and the Yemen People's Democratic Republic.